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Expert: Consistency of reports requires studies of UFOs

NEW YORK (UPI) — People who report UFOs have definitely seen something, but whether it's because of a psychological condition, an unknown earthly phenomenon or alien spaceships remains to be determined, a UFO specialist said.

J. Allen Hynek, head of the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Ill., and a professor emeritus at Northwestern University, said thousands of unidentified flying object reports — many by credible observers — have been collected from around the world.

He said the descriptions of the objects display a "strange consistency" and cannot be explained by any ordinary means. They therefore constitute a phenomenon worth studying.

Hynek said a computer analysis of 400 well-substantiated cases has demonstrated that the reported properties of UFOs are "totally inconsistent with those of everyday objects and phenomena."

"For example, some of the best-investigated and well-documented UFO reports describe objects or luminous phenomena that can hover noiselessly close to the ground and then almost instantaneously take off with tremendous speed," he said.

There eventually may be such a psycho-

logical explanation, however.

"The whole UFO phenomenon may tell

us more about ourselves than it does outer space," Hynek said.

James E. Oberg, a

Houston space engineer, said nearly all UFO sightings can be explained by ordinary

means and those that cannot merely constitute a normal residue of unsolved cases.

The latest on UFOs and E.T.s

By Steven Findlay
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Do UFOs exist? Can people bend spoons with psychic power? Is there life on distant planets?

Scientists usually don't dwell on such questions. But Tuesday at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting here, the USA's largest annual science get-together, eight experts in such matters discussed:

■ **UFOs.** Scientifically, says Houston space engineer James Oberg, most UFO sightings have been explained; many recorded in the 1960s were traced to Russian spacecraft tests.

But J. Allen Hynek, head of the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Ill., and a professor emeritus at Northwestern University, says a computer analysis of 400 well-substantiated sightings has shown that the reported properties of UFOs are "totally inconsistent with those of everyday objects and phenomena."

The consensus: There is no proof that a spaceship from another planet has visited Earth.

■ **Psychic phenomena** (telepathy, ESP, psychokinesis, clairvoyance). Most psychic reports are hoaxes, very often blown out of proportion by the media, says magician and skeptic James Randi.

But Stanley Krippner, of the Center for Consciousness Studies in San Francisco, says it's wrong to assume that psychic phenomena are "non-ordinary." They may be extensions of our senses that scientists can't yet understand, he says.

The consensus: Still no proof, but we should keep looking.

■ **Extraterrestrial intelligence.** "As best we know now, life on Earth is not unique," says Cornell University astronomer Frank Drake. In fact, scientists now think there could be as many as 10,000 civilizations in the universe.

The problem: If there are 10,000, where are they; why haven't we found them, or they us?

Our nearest neighbors could live within 100,000 light-years from us. It shouldn't have taken them this long to get in touch, says Eric Jones of the Los Alamos national laboratory, Los Alamos, N.M.

The consensus — "Keep searching," says science fiction author Isaac Asimov. "I think we all hope there will be somebody out there."

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